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The Correct Political Affiliation

Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35

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When I was growing up, people used to say there are two things you never discuss for fear of getting into conflict - politics and religion. These areas contain deeply held values, so the thinking goes that if you avoid talking about politics and religion, you will plot a safe course for your relationships. Later, in high school and at the university, I was told that you also must maintain the separation of church and state. Somehow, that seemed to make sense, sort of building on the other value, of not talking about politics and religion. Keep the church out of politics and politics out of the church - seemed pretty simple.

Imagine my surprise when I learned, much later, that this is not what the separation of church and state means. The 'separation clause' of the United States Constitution says that the state must not involve itself in the practice of religion - it doesn't say and nowhere implies the opposite. The 'founding fathers' understood that churches and religious people would also have political views, and the 'founding fathers' wanted everyone in the body politic to participate in the body politic. They expected church-going people to be active citizens.

Thus, I teach and preach that we should be active in our community, and in government, and in society. I also teach, as I did in my sermon last week, that politics can easily reflect human self-centeredness as opposed to biblical principles. The solution, the ideal, is that we bring an active commitment to Jesus Christ, a value system rooted in the Word of God, into the political arena, without insisting that all issues to be discussed always have some religious answer.

The active involvement of a Christian with the state is constrained by the primary allegiance of the Christian. In the cross, Christ revealed the cruelty, the inhumanity, the futility of the human-centered way of doing politics and organizing human affairs. In the cross, Christ transferred us to another kingdom, if you will, transferring our citizenship from the realm of earthly powers to that of heaven. As Christ-centered people, our primary citizenship is with Jesus, and the kingdom of God he inaugurated. That's the hard lesson for the Christian to learn - that as citizens of heaven, we are not free to give *primary* allegiance to secular politics. Though there may not always be a specifically Christ or Bible oriented way to do government, looking to Jesus or looking to the Word is where a Christian must start.

In Philippians, Paul contrasts those whose minds are set on *earthly things* with those who remember that *our citizenship is in heaven*. Citizenship is about where you live. It's about the values, commitments, loyalties, and allegiances that make you who you are. When you cross an international border and hand the customs officers your passport, you are revealing where you live, where you make your home, and where you have come from and to where you shall return. Citizenship.

Paul reminds the Philippians that when he speaks about present problems, that the Philippians are different. They are different because their citizenship is in heaven. The country to which they now belong has a different ruler with different rules

for living. You can't grow as a Christian and forget that.

Luke shares with us the words Jesus used to respond to political intimidation. The Pharisees relay to Jesus a warning that Herod, the political ruler of the Jews, is out to kill him. Jesus takes the Pharisees at face value as agents of Herod, itself a sad comment given that the Pharisees are supposed to be the *religious* leaders of the nation. Jesus tells them to tell their master that he is not intimidated in the slightest and will continue his work, which consists of preaching reconciliation to the Father and performing 'signs and wonders.'

The connecting theme today is that we rally around a different image of what life is all about - different from the world in which we live. If anything, we are asked to be *countercultural*. We are asked to rally around *that* [point to large cross in sanctuary] or *this* [point to small cross]. You might want to begin wearing one - and, if you do, make it a wooden one, not the stylized gold or silver cross people use as jewelry, but a wooden cross that makes a statement, that says this is not just a pretty adornment but is a representation of something solid in which you believe. The cross we have here or the cross we wear reminds us that we are citizens of another realm, that we are not supposed to become comfortable with the values or orientations of the world in which we happen to reside.

I believe it is powerful freedom to know where your true land lies, and where you are destined to be when it's all said and done. In a drawer in my study at home is my United States passport, comforting to me to know that if I go abroad, this document identifies me as an American citizen. Yet, when I die, I also know that my citizenship as an American dies with me. On a dresser in our bedroom at home is a wooden cross, comforting to me because I chose it as a symbol of my primary citizenship in the kingdom of God, a citizenship that *will not end* when I die.

Being a citizen of *that* realm makes all the difference for how you live in *this* one.

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